

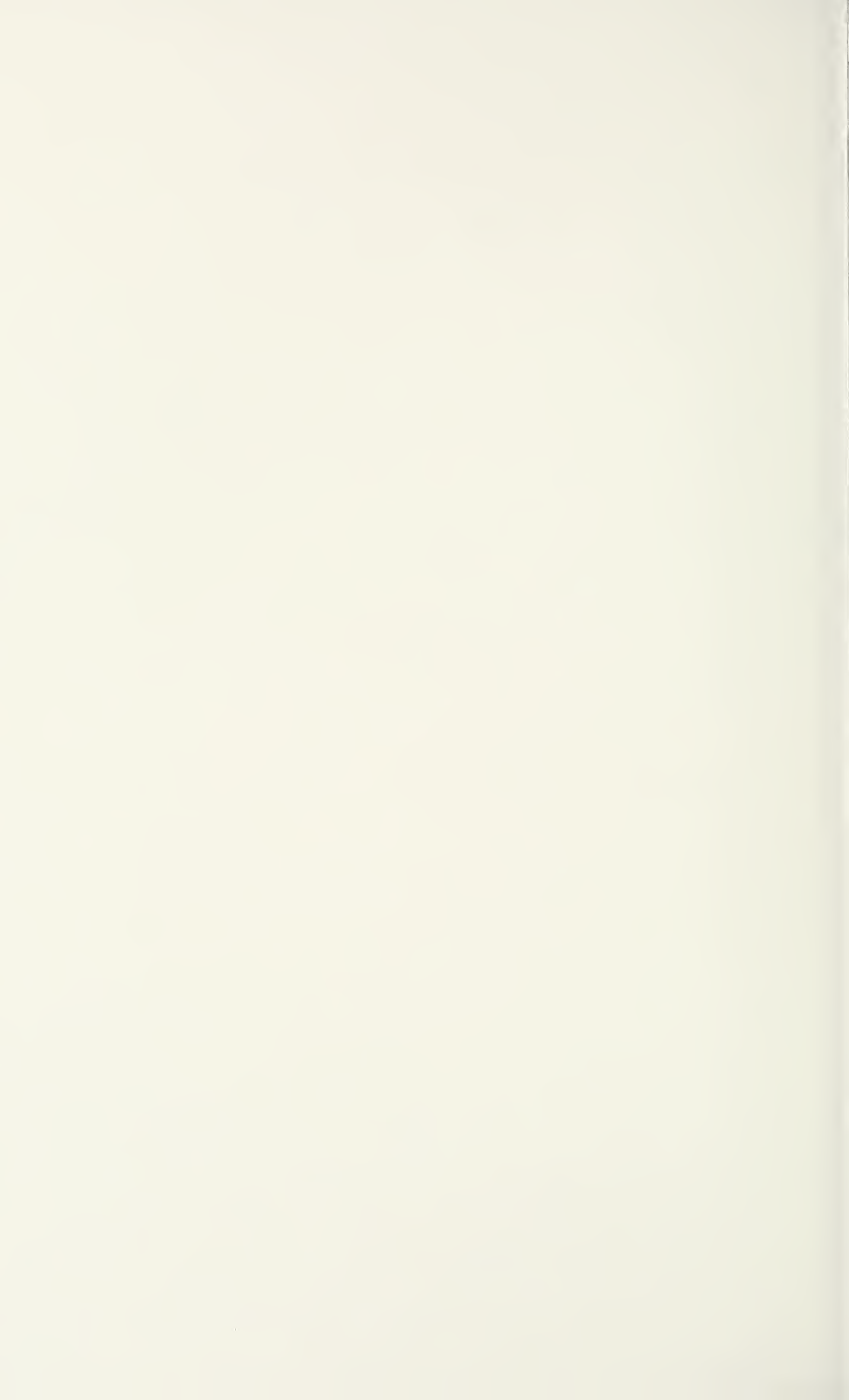
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ELEVENTH
PRESENTATION
OF THE

CHARLES LANG FREER MEDAL



APRIL 5, 2001



FREER GALLERY OF ART
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ELEVENTH PRESENTATION
OF THE
CHARLES LANG FREER MEDAL



APRIL 5, 2001

Freer Gallery of Art



Oleg Grabar, ca. 1995

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Introduction

MILO CLEVELAND BEACH

Director, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery
Smithsonian Institution

THE PRESENTATION of the Charles Lang Freer Medal is an occasion for the Freer Gallery of Art to reaffirm its commitment, and that of its founder, to the fostering and recognition of scholarship at the highest level. The Freer Medal was inaugurated in 1956 to honor the gallery's founder, Charles Freer. The Medal was designed by the sculptor Paul Manship, and it has been awarded only ten times. Professor Oleg Grabar, who today becomes the eleventh recipient of the Medal, is preceded in this distinction by Osvald Sirén, Ernst Kühnel, Yashiro Yukio, Tanaka Ichimatsu, Laurence Sickman, Roman Ghirshman, Max Loehr, Stella Kramrisch, Alexander Soper, and (most recently) Sherman E. Lee. It is an immensely distinguished list.

While Professor Grabar has been pivotal in the study of Islamic art in the United States for the last half century, his work has also had enormous impact internationally on understanding of the arts of Islam. It is not only through his research and its diffusion through publications and lectures that his influence is so profoundly felt. Oleg Grabar is a model of scholarly discipline, but also of the ways by which scholarship is communicated and made engaging. Having known many of his students over the years, I can attest to their esteem for and absolute dedication to Oleg Grabar as a teacher and a person. And because of

the training he provided, these students now hold many of the greatest academic and museum positions at major institutions throughout the world.

Born in Strasbourg, France, in 1929, the first of two sons of the Byzantinist Andre Grabar, Oleg Grabar came to America for his university education, earning his B.A. (1950) from Harvard College in medieval history and his M.A. (1953) and Ph.D. (1955) from Princeton University in oriental languages and literatures and the history of art. He began his teaching career in 1954 at the University of Michigan, an institution that has always maintained close ties with the Freer Gallery; but in 1969, he moved to his alma mater, Harvard, where he was named the first Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture in 1980.

Professor Grabar's accomplishments began with his participation as a graduate student in an American Numismatics Society seminar that led to an early interest in coinage and his earliest publications. He wrote a dissertation on the art and ceremony of the Umayyad court, which generated several important articles on the art of the Umayyads in Syria. He expanded his research on early Islamic architecture into a series of lectures at Oberlin College on the origins of Islamic art and this eventually became one of his most influential works, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (1973), a study that has been continually in print and widely translated. Other important publications on early Islamic architecture range from a study of the *Alhambra* (1978) in Islamic Spain to *The Great Mosque of Isfahan* (1990) and *The Dome of the Rock* (1996).

While studying at Princeton, Professor Grabar became interested in Islamic manuscripts after taking a course under the renowned art historian Kurt Weitzmann. His interests in the illustrated book resulted in a series of groundbreaking publications, including the early thirteenth-century *Maqamat* by al-Hariri and the celebrated fourteenth-century Mongol *Book of Kings* known as the "Demotte" *Shahnama*. In the late



Oleg Grabar with students
in the Arthur M. Sackler
Gallery storage area, 1990

1980s, the Sackler Gallery purchased the collection of Henri Vever, which included eight illustrated pages from this crucially important *Shahnama*, a manuscript from which the Freer already owned seven illustrations—making these galleries the major center for study of this book. Because of the regulations then applying at the Freer Gallery, the Freer and Sackler pages could not be exhibited together in public space; however, they could be placed together within the Sackler storage areas. We offered this possibility to Professor Grabar, who arrived with a full class of graduate students and was joined by a number of past students who had heard about the event. The result was a day-long private exhibition and seminar, and it remains one of the greatest days in the history of the Freer and Sackler.

In the mid-1970s, Professor Grabar became interested in the contemporary practice of architecture in the Islamic world through his involvement with the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. This association served to broaden his interests and experience beyond the traditional confines of the medieval period, and his extensive travels allowed him to study contemporary uses and interpretations of traditional structures. The support that developed for contemporary Islamic architecture has made this one of the most exciting contemporary architectural traditions in the world.

The association with the Aga Khan and the Aga Khan Award soon led to the establishment of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Archi-

ecture at Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Professor Grabar was named the program's joint director and with his colleagues he laid the foundation for an enterprise that has been in existence and highly influential for more than twenty years.

In 1990, Professor Grabar retired from Harvard to assume his present position as professor in the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, and to devote himself full-time to lecturing and research. In his career, which spans half a century, Professor Grabar has been honored with numerous medals and published more than 20 books and 130 articles. He has trained about 60 Ph.D.s in Islamic art and architecture—a record that must be unrivaled. Since this group includes not only the last four curators of Islamic art at the Freer Gallery, but also the current director of the International Art Museums at the Smithsonian, Dr. Thomas Lentz, we are beholden in many ways to Professor Grabar.

Oleg Grabar's productivity continues today at a remarkable level. In 2000, for example, he published *Mostly Miniatures: An Introduction to Persian Painting* and this year a new edition has appeared of his fundamental survey *The Art and Architecture of Islam: 650–1250*, written with Richard Ettinghausen and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina. Articles and reviews seem to materialize effortlessly.

It is a great honor therefore to ask Oleg Grabar to come forward for the presentation.

On behalf of the chancellor and the regents of the Smithsonian Institution, and the curators and staff of the Freer Gallery, I hereby present you with the Freer Medal. The citation, as written on the medal itself, reads:

*For distinguished contribution to the knowledge and understanding of
Oriental civilizations as reflected in their arts. ۞*

چنان است ازین برت زاید و دلور جهان مانع از کار او زین کف یکی خانه برتر ز اقیوت زرد کشیدند بر او جادوی ز که هر سه خانه چون کتاب که ای از روز ز جدین شوند اندک ز که آمد کز دود شاه از بنین پیش او نهی که نیکو که از زدی بود هر نه هرگز شیند کشت نام شاه چه خیزشت کمانه با یکدست کسبان نهد با کس او همان نخل کنی با شاخ و باز کوی ز ما بدان آن مژدی موم که از روز جهان بگذرد نه زبان بزور یک خون نشک بر ما شود ز رفتن که نه شود داور بشتری با بد کن از جان او که نام و در دوزخ بره بر سه جو آمد بزور یک کور با زشت زوشت در آن حال نیاید	ازین کشت با همی دست فراوان برودند زور یک تاه که جای دود دام و ماهی بد بزور خانبک یکی شوزخت و روزان شوز زوهسه موم باغ و زمان فرخ هر زین و زبان شد شوزخت شامیت زینا کت غنی کشت و نه اندک جان کت در زرم از خردی شاد بود انوشه که کسزدی ما بر کار روز و از انوع از او کسزد	با جوج و ما جوج بنی دست ز حیزی که بود اندکان جا کاه حنین تا بر دیک که می نشید نهاده برین سینه زور و یکی شوز با او شجور چراغ همه شوز بر جای از آن شد کسوز و زنگا بنت کاه کت و زان که از دنیا با کسوزت همه موم و چراغ آباد بود صی کت هرگز که ای شهر بار کسزدن از زورمان شاد کرد	جزور یک صد بار هضای او که فی یوم آذ زمان و زین بزنج آنما از شاه و نساه میان اندوین جنبه استوار به بخار کسوز زور و خشار و کسوز خاشاک خاندان عیانت کسوز با زاید کسوز خروشان و هینام بر دکان بد شاد کسوز از زورم شید بنی زور و کسوز ترافتند که زینش زورمان با زور که ای شاه جزور با کسوز زای که کسوزان شکستید نهفت جزور و شوز و زور کسوز شوز کسوز با زور که او از او بشود نیک شوز شوز کسوز به شوز ای کسوز کسوزان شوز هینام	از غر اهد بود سالی او زورم کسوز خیزدند آفرین کسی زاید کسوز و یون بره سسه خانه کسوز با ای باور شوز زورم و شوز جان کسوز زور کسوز کسوزان خانه خوز شوز خیزدیدی که آن کسوز زورمان جا کسوز زور کسوز باه بیابان شوزی زینید زورم کسوزان از زور کسوز کسوزان کسوزی تان با کسوز عین کسوز با شوز هینام زینیت اندوز کسوز سسه مانه کسوزان او شوز زینید ازیشان که آن کسوز شوز کسوز که کسوزی زور شوز کسوز کسوز از زور زورم کسوز کسوزی مانع کسوز کسوز دید از ما کسوز کسی زاید با زورمان نیک شوز کسوز کسوزی زور
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زینید از کسوز زورم کسوز



Iskandar (Alexander the Great) at the Talking Tree, from a copy of the *Shanama* by Firdawsi (d. 1020). Iran, Tabriz, ca. 1335–40; ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. 40.8 x 30.1 cm, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Purchase F1935.23

From the Museum to the University and Back

OLEG GRABAR

AS I ACCEPTED, a couple of months ago, the honor of receiving the Freer Medal, two unrelated thoughts or feelings ran through my mind. One was the pride and satisfaction of being recognized in this memorable fashion and also in being only the second recipient to represent the field of Islamic art. The previous one was Ernst Kühnel, an elegant gentleman I well remember, who steered the Islamic collections in Berlin during difficult years and who, occasionally, used his linguistic talents, his personal charm, and his love of travel on behalf of national politics. It would not surprise me to learn that several of the other recipients had similarly been involved in the complex political and financial webs implied in the twentieth century by the knowledge, study, and care of the arts of Asia, perhaps of all arts but one's own. The second thought I had was that if one considers their primary affiliation alone, the ten previous recipients consisted of one archaeologist, three university professors, five curators who became eventually directors of museums and who taught occasionally, and one who straddled between excavations and explorations, teaching and collecting, the world of the cherished object and the magic of the eloquent word.

These thoughts and feelings, in turn, led to two sets of questions. Should, can, the historian of Islamic art escape the contemporary con-

tingencies and pressures of the world with which he or she deals? Or, to put it another way, what is the nature of the accommodations made by the scholar of the arts with the contemporary passions and needs of so many different lands (including his or her own), so varied in the state and character of their own individual concerns with culture and the arts? The second set of questions is simpler: at a time of intense professionalism, can the historian be an archaeologist, a teacher, and a curator, sequentially or simultaneously? Such are the themes I would like to develop today by meditating over the past fifty years in the study of Islamic art, the half-century of my involvement with it. I do so with some sadness, as the flip side of ceremonial celebrations like this one is to compel a focus on one's age and to remember the many years past without as much hope for the few to go.

Going back to 1951, I can recall some twenty or twenty-five individuals from Tashkent to Cleveland with competent involvement in the study of Islamic art. Within a few years of my first steps as a graduate student, certainly by the time of the 1960 congress of orientalists in Moscow if not already by the time of the 1956 one in Munich, I knew all but two of them personally. There were at that time only two small books introducing Islamic art to the general public, one in French and the other one in German. There was one older survey in German with a short text but beautiful, for that time, photographs and a manual in French on painting and the decorative and industrial arts, in two volumes with lousy illustrations. *University Prints*, the collection of black-and-white photographs known to all students of the history of art who are over sixty, had a volume of images of Islamic art which formed a good, if idiosyncratic, survey of the field. Today, there are 250 members of an informal organization of historians of Islamic art and probably another fifty or so have not joined either by negligence or because of lack of funds. A dozen books exist to introduce students and amateurs

to the field; nearly all of them are in English. And, even though one rarely finds the slide or photograph one wants, photographic, slide, film, and by now probably web-based collections of Islamic art have multiplied enormously. It is easy enough to rejoice in this growth, to feel that progress is with us and that the future is rosy indeed.

And in many ways this is indeed so. The success of so many exhibitions of Islamic art, the popularity of tours focusing on monuments of Islamic culture, and increased enrollments in courses dealing with it are definitely healthy signs of interest in and curiosity about the field, even if much remains simpleminded and opinionated in the critical responses toward things Islamic found in the media. How and why did it happen? Why this growth when the popularity of most Islamic countries is low, the association of Islam with terrorism, fanaticism, and totalitarian governments dominates the media, and when the destruction in the name of Islam of the Buddhas of Afghanistan seems so contrary to civilized behavior? Why the contrast between the growth of interest in the field and the weakness of the critical discourse dealing with it? The story of this growth, at least as I have explained it to myself, is in part anecdotal, the result of the activities, behavior, and personalities of a small number of individuals and institutions. But it is also the story of contradictory pressures that offer striking challenges to the future. These pressures are intellectual and academic as well as social, cultural, and political and I shall try to weave together my recollections and judgments of people and institutions with the intellectual or political movements of our time. I do so with an entrenched belief in two intractable paradoxes: it is ethically dubious to consider works of art as the privilege of the few, yet nearly impossible to make them accessible to all, and the study of art is not an elitist activity for the leisure classes but it does require an investment in time and money that is not available to most people.

I shall return to some of these issues in conclusion, but let me tell the story first. In 1950, dealing with Islamic art was still, as it had been since the beginning of the century, dealing with objects, including books with their illuminations and illustrations. The gathering of and caring for collections was the main task of the few who were interested and employed, surrounded, as they were, by a number of private collectors and by a small band of dealers, who could be social gentlemen with a fancy house off Fifth Avenue or bazaar merchants in Isfahan or New York. Often shrouded in secrecy for fear of awakening the competition, the search for important, beautiful, or revealing objects was carried out by museum curators with the help of art merchants and the generosity of collectors and patrons. Since the old sources in Istanbul were no longer easily accessible after World War I, new sources were found, mostly old private collections in Europe, India, and, to a smaller degree, Iran. The competition for the best items was fierce. I still recall the intense annoyance of Maurice Dimand, the curator of Islamic art at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, at the acquisition of the d'Arenberg basin by the Freer Gallery, as he had, apparently, been on its tracks for many years. And then there was the suggestion by Basil Gray, the distinguished curator at the British Museum, that some miniatures he could not acquire for his museum were in fact forgeries. The technique of the day was connoisseurship and the buzz word for the judgment of a colleague was the possession (or absence) of an "eye." While awareness of a few Arabic letters was a useful tool, even the reading knowledge of languages other than French, English, or German was not particularly prized.

The essential point is that those who authenticated, exhibited, and acquired works of Islamic art belonged, perhaps not always with full membership, to a socially sophisticated culture of similar men and a few women. For them, to deal with a Persian miniature was the same

as to deal with a Rembrandt drawing. The same ways and the same objectives were involved: attribution and dating based on the minute observation of an object, an ill-defined sense of quality and authenticity, and a rich memory of comparable items, many of which were not available to the general public. The ultimate ambition was to present an object, to help it make its debut in the society of beautiful things. The originality of Islamic art in this context was that its works were almost always small and included products of what were then called the industrial or decorative arts—textiles, ceramics, glass, metalwork, ivory, woodwork. It was the art of objects indispensable for the exhibition of something else, but not necessarily to be studied for their own sake. And so the arts of the Islamic world became popular on a very special spin-off lecturing circuit of “needle-and-bobbin” clubs dedicated to textiles, Hajji Baba clubs for rugs, self-evident bibliophile or ceramic societies with, at least in the United States, branches in the posh suburbs of wealthy cities. It was a world dominated by money and social privilege and it is the one that provided galleries of Islamic art to most major museums in the United States, usually as appendices to the larger areas reserved to the arts of Asia or to the Middle Ages, depending on local constraints. At irregular intervals, small or large exhibitions of new acquisitions or of private collections, at times of a technique, but always with a short and reasonably priced, partially illustrated, checklist or even catalogue, kept the field alive and provided pleasant social encounters. It was a wonderfully cozy world of like minds, even if they sometimes disliked each other as persons. But by the end of the fifties and the sixties, five very different impulses came to the fore, which changed that world completely. They were: forgeries, architecture, archaeology, universities, and national states.

As early as in the twenties, probably even earlier, forgeries began to appear in order to meet a buyer’s market and, unfortunately, even

individuals with significant scholarly credentials became, knowingly or not, involved in their dissemination. With the appearance of new markets in the fifties, the number and especially the quality of forgeries increased. The stories of three of them, with which I became familiar, have had an interesting impact on scholarship. Late in the fifties there appeared a Persian manuscript, the *Andarzname*, dated in 1090 of our era with some ninety illustrations, which would have been the earliest illustrated nonscientific manuscript made anywhere in the Islamic world. First, all known scholars of the time except one believed in its genuineness, but then, doubts began to raise their ugly heads, and at a dramatic meeting of the International Congress of Persian Art and Archaeology held in New York, Richard Ettinghausen unsealed and read a hitherto secret analysis of the pigments made by R. J. Gettens at the Freer Gallery, which demonstrated that some at least (all, according to most scholars) of the pages were modern forgeries. There is more to that story than this simple outline, and much in it reflects badly on the profession, but the point is that from that moment on the manuscript disappeared into the dustbin of our collective memory, even though the likely hypothesis of a forgery was never really tested in full.

A bit earlier, a dramatic and bellicose article by Florence Day, then at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, argued that most, if not all, of a large number of silks from the eleventh and twelfth centuries known as the Buyid textiles were contemporary forgeries. Debates and discussions went on for several decades, but, after thorough technical analyses carried out in Europe and a variety of epigraphic and stylistic studies, most of the textiles were indeed pronounced to be forgeries. I was not much involved with these textiles, but I was involved with the third of my examples, which is the so-called Sasanian silver. In the late fifties and sixties, even in the seventies, a large number of silver plates and pitchers appeared, which bore a lot of similarities with a long-known group

attributed to the last pre-Islamic Iranian dynasty of the Sasanians and kept for the most part in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. You could find these objects in the small antique shops of the Charbagh in Isfahan or in the vaults of fancy dealers in New York. To some of us they were an extraordinary new documentation; to others they were all forgeries. A well-known French scholar stated to me in Paris, while we were walking through an exhibition organized by a recipient of the Freer Medal and later shown in Washington, which contained a number of these new objects, that all the “Sasanian” pieces that were not from the Hermitage were obviously fraudulent.

I had organized an exhibition of these objects, mostly new ones, in Ann Arbor in 1967 and remember how a younger colleague who did not know me had brought a bunch of students to the exhibition; she was going with them from window to window saying with passion: “not Sasanian, probably forgery” to practically every item there. She had not read the catalogue, which brought up some of these issues, although without the extreme judgments she had developed. We eventually became good friends, but the event illustrates something of the public fervor with which these matters were then discussed. The beginning of a solution, or at least of a process for a solution, began to emerge, as, for several years, meetings were organized (one in the basement of the old Freer Gallery) around technical and scientific reports that filled several folders in my archives. I am not sure that we ever came to a definitive conclusion, but many of these objects disappeared from the market and very few have been acquired since the early seventies by any reputable collection. In fact, it is with some nostalgia that I visited a few years ago the vault of a major American museum where a group of them were lined up on a shelf as though forgotten in a sort of purgatory.

Such stories of dramas or farces based on the authenticity of objects could be continued. The point to my story is that they con-

tributed to a permanent climatic change in museums: the power of the scientist in his lab decreeing what is good and what is bad. In 1956 or '57, at a memorable lunch in Munich, where nearly all the members of the tribe of connoisseurs and historians of Islamic art were gathered, Hagop Kevorkian, the last of the great dealers and benefactors of the field of Islamic art, who was then in his nineties (or so he said; some thought he was younger), chided us all for believing in lab reports more than in our own eyes. He was, no doubt, right in saying that museum scholarship had abdicated some of its rights and privileges to the microscope, just as medical stethoscopes have given way to lab analyses. It is a lesson of history that privileges disappear, and I shall return to broader implications of this point later on. In the meantime, it is true that technical labs and scientific analyses have taken precedence over visual connoisseurship and have detected numerous forgeries missed by the eyes. They may have also been misused, as in at least one case known to me, and quite a few objects, especially in gold, have suddenly become suspect when science could not demonstrate their old age.

The second new dimension of these decades is the appearance of Islamic architecture as a major achievement of Islamic art and as a major concern for historians, overshadowing in the eyes of many the world of objects. Already in the nineteenth century, Ottoman architecture in Istanbul and Bursa, Mamluk architecture in Cairo, the Alhambra, and the Taj Mahal had gained recognition and, in particular for Cairo and Granada, major publications had spread their forms from the world fairs of Paris, Philadelphia, or Chicago to the atelier of Louis Sullivan in St. Louis. In the thirties to fifties of this century, Iran and Central Asia, hitherto inaccessible, came into the consciousness of historians and the volumes of K. A. C. Creswell and Georges Marçais provided systematic and precise chronological surveys of monuments organized according to coherent dynastic and functional categories. What was

important about these books was, first of all, the revelation of a history rather than of a collection and, secondly, the appearance of people. Architectural drawings require or imply personages and a consciousness of the human patrons, makers, and users of buildings. They all left inscriptions and other documents of life in the using and making of buildings that are unavailable for books and objects until much later.

There are many other reasons for this growth of interest in architecture and of a scholarship devoted to it. I would like to mention two. One is that architecture remained throughout the centuries—and still is today—a major activity everywhere and architects now, as probably in the past, feel in communion with all architects wherever they are or have been. During my many years with the Aga Khan Program and Award, we never had any trouble getting the most celebrated architects and architectural critics from the West or Japan to become involved with contemporary Islamic architecture. Until a few very recent exceptions, I do not know of a single instance of a painter or art critic with comparable reputation even deigning to look at works outside of western Europe, North America, or, perhaps, Japan. I twice tried and failed in both cases, even with open-minded left-wing historians who were ready to fight against any oppression any place, to have them recognize an equality, even a potential, of artistic merits between modern Western and Asian arts. Architects did appreciate traditions other than their own and this is much to their credit.

The other reason for the growing presence of architecture in the consciousness of Islamic art historical studies was orientalist travel and its consequences. Here too, exotic travel by Europeans can be traced back to Marco Polo, and it developed a great deal in the seventeenth century. Travelers then and now saw mostly works of architecture and recorded what people did in them. With the colonial or imperial takeover of most of the Muslim world, Iran and Ottoman Turkey excepted, the number

and professionalism of such travels increased. Many architects and other professional adventurers sought and found employment in the Muslim world and left thousands of drawings and photographs, sometimes even notes, to commemorate their experiences and their work. Far more than miniatures kept in rare book rooms or objects available only in a few Western collections, architecture provided a flavor of otherness tied to a level of technology comparable to what was done in Europe or America. Although most of these claims turned out to be unacceptable, it became for a while possible to argue that Gothic architecture began in Iran, that the seventeenth-century Milanese architect Guarini was inspired by the Great Mosque of Cordova, and that Brunelleschi's *duomo* in Florence drew on the technology of Mongol Iran.

And then travel brought first drawings and, later, photographs. One of the ironies of my story is that the first book of mine, and for a long time the only one, that was looked at by many more people than specialized scholars and colleagues was a photographic survey of architectural decoration. The photographs had been taken by the recently deceased Derek Hill, a British landscape and portrait painter, in buildings I, for the most part, had never seen. No such book could have been imagined for paintings or metalwork; architecture's only competitor was rugs. These photographs are now obsolete for the most part, but dozens of more recent volumes, often lavishly published, carry superb color photographs of Islamic architecture, often accompanied by mediocre and ill-informed texts.

A third novelty was archaeology. Leaving aside the pilfering of old sites for the art market, an activity that increased enormously in Syria, Egypt, and Iran in the late nineteenth century, leaving aside the recording of Islamic remains in classical or biblical sites, a task rarely accomplished with any sort of care, leaving especially the one great exception of the ninth-century Abbasid capital known as Samarra in Iraq, formal

and organized excavations in search of Islamic sites began in the thirties. In Cairo-Fustat in Egypt, Balis, Raqqah, and Qasr al-Hayr West in Syria, Khirbat al-Minyah and Khirbat al-Mafjar in Palestine, Nishapur in Iran, Afrasiyab and Tirmidh in then Soviet Central Asia, scholars with reasonable credentials as historians or archaeologists, often inspired or even compelled by newly formed departments of antiquities and national museums, uncovered a whole new world for the understanding of Islamic art. They found objects and paintings and decorated stuccoes. These were initially meant to enrich the galleries and storerooms of sponsoring museums, but soon the export of excavated objects was prohibited and museums became more reluctant to sponsor excavations. Universities, foundations, and various national resources took over and this led to a proliferation of archaeological expeditions of all sorts ranging from true excavations of specific sites to small soundings and rapid surveys.

But this is not the important point about archaeology's impact on the study of Islamic art. What does matter is that the key criteria of visual selection based on presumed quality characteristic of the collector's ways, which had prevailed until then, were replaced by statistical evidence in which everything was counted. It became wrong, almost immoral, to establish value judgments in discussing discovered objects. I recall the time when Robert McCormick Adams, later to become secretary general of the Smithsonian, told me how he was looking for a book to learn about Islamic ceramics in order to help him out in his archaeological surveys in Iraq, how he found Arthur Lane's classic *Early Islamic Pottery*, and then discovered to his surprise and, I should add, critical dismay, that not one of Lane's numerous examples corresponded to anything he had found in the Islamic layers of his investigations. Lane dealt, mostly, with works of ceramic art, not with the common pottery of the archaeologist. The buildings uncovered by archaeologists

were sometimes palaces, but most often ruined ones and, more often than not, miserable houses and utilitarian buildings that did not have much to do with the Alhambra or the Great Mosque of Isfahan. As Maxime Rodinson put it in the review of a wonderful book of archaeological surveys in northern Syria, archaeologists sought “total history,” not selected beautiful buildings and objects that are the fodder of the historian of art.

Excavations have continued and are still going on today; there is even a periodical called *Archéologie Islamique* in addition to a dozen or so bulletins of departments of antiquities from Spain to Pakistan. Most archaeologists do not publish the results of their work and, until web culture truly becomes usable, we will depend on occasional topical articles, but especially on being wired to archaeological culture. It is a world of its own, fascinated with chronological sequences of drawings of broken ceramic sherds, with constant innovations in spectrographic or dendrochronological techniques, with a passion for abstract graphs and multicolored pies when dealing with spatial analyses, with value-free sampling as a technique for historical documentation, and many other channels of discourse that seem quite remote from the pleasure of a unique object or the reconstruction of a great monument with which archaeology began. And, most sadly, archaeologists tend to talk only to other archaeologists, no longer to historians of art. Thus, a few exceptions notwithstanding, a relationship that had been very fruitful is no longer as effective as it had been.

The fourth feature that affected the museum and object-centered study of Islamic art was the appearance of the field of Islamic art in universities. Until the late fifties and with sporadic bursts of interest here and there, it was only at the University of Michigan and, in a more limited way, at the University of Cairo that the field had established a fairly consistent base since the thirties. By 1975 or so, a dozen institu-



Left to right: Philip Stern, former director of the Freer Gallery of Art; Oleg Grabar; and acclaimed metalwork expert Cyril Stanley Smith, in the Freer Gallery conservation lab, 1969 or 1970. Photograph by W. Thomas Chase

tions had made appointments in the field in the United States and a few more in Europe and the Muslim world itself. Another half a dozen positions have been added since then. These changes were the result of several factors: the views of a number of powerful and enlightened chairmen of departments of art history, the Ford and other foundations providing funds for the study of foreign areas, various forms of federal aid with many names over the decades for the development of libraries and the formation of students with the ability of dealing with Muslim lands, numerous programs like a generous Fulbright fellowship system that encouraged travel for students and faculties by making such travels attractively lucrative, the growth and development of European and American research institutes in almost every major Islamic country. Especially in the context of this talk, it is particularly important to single out the Freer Fund at the University of Michigan, which has benefited so many students and instructors. It is a development to

which I owe a great deal, as my first year at the University of Michigan in 1954–55 was financed by the Ford Foundation and for fourteen years or so the Freer Fund was the source that fed much of my teaching and research. In the broadest sense, many aspects of these developments altered dramatically the field of Islamic art and moved it very much away from the collecting culture prevailing until then.

One aspect was the importance given to learning the languages of the Muslim world as well as the cultural, economic, and social context of art. Earlier practitioners of these ways, all Europeans, like Max van Berchem and Ernst Herzfeld, had no consistent institutional affiliation. Jean Sauvaget spent years in research institutes before finding a position in Paris and his sarcastic attitude toward museums, collectors, and even objects led to rather stinging, and partly unfair, attacks on those who were involved with them. It is at the University of Michigan and in the Freer Gallery that Richard Ettinghausen became the one scholar of the century who had a good command of both Arabic and Persian and who could and did deal effectively with both the museum and the university, as he demonstrated in his later years in New York. By compelling contextual queries about works of art, the university provided a new focus for the study of the arts. A great Israeli scholar, the late Joshua Prawer, was heard to say that finally there were historians of art who could read Persian or Arabic. He did not point out that it is equally desirable and much rarer to find historians who know how to look at monuments as documents for history, but the point is still true that linguistic awareness and some degree of linguistic competency in a language of Muslim history became a badge of credibility in scholarship and knowledge. And, with the spread of the field, secondary literature appeared everywhere and in many languages; I once counted that there were twenty-five languages needed to read everything pertinent to the study of Islamic art.

Another aspect of university life was the intellectualization of the study of Islamic art through constant contact with other disciplines. There is something exhilarating for me, even after so many years, in recalling the intellectual pleasure I and many of my generation felt at discovering linguistics, structuralism, Marxism, historicism, new historicism, modernism, postmodernism, colonialism, postcolonialism, anthropology, cognitive psychology, feminism, deconstruction, and so many approaches sweeping through the humanities and the social sciences. I once told Max Loehr, my colleague in Michigan and then at Harvard and a recipient of the Freer Medal, that the ideal history of art was one without pictures, in which the correct, coherent, and intelligent sequence of words would tell the story of the arts and explain everything. Max Loehr's reply was that the real ideal history of art is a sequence of pictures and of details of pictures which would be so clear that there would not be any need for a word. In the wisdom of old age, I know now that we were both wrong and right. It is words that reflect and transmit thought and knowledge, but these words are hollow abstractions without the visually perceived images in our memory, stored there through direct contact with monuments and artifacts or through photographs. I regret that age removes impetuosity and the joy of taking intellectual risks publicly, arguing and debating without rancor or hate. Sauvaget used to write articles correcting and contradicting his own previous works, whereas we are constrained now to the blandness issued from peer reviewing and standardized editing and by the fear of controversy and criticism, as though mistakes are sins for which one must eternally pay. The absurd silliness of our political judgments has affected academics as well.

While the forms of university-based research may have lost some punch, the excitement of constant hobnobbing with many different fields and ways of thinking is still exhilarating, as was the obligation to

include the field of Islamic art in vast surveys or to wonder about problems of visual understanding in general for which the history of Islamic art offers insights. And then, especially since the seventies, the history of art itself began to change, as theoretical constructs grew like wildfire and often came to displace the knowledge and experience of objects. To many of us, abstract theories and thinking provided a badge of intellectual quality to the field, and it is interesting to see how an institution like the Clark Institute in Williamstown, with its stunning collection of paintings, has hired ardent theoreticians as full members of the staff. The history of art should not be contained within the closed walls of technical, historical, or territorial specificity or it will slowly revert to its ancient and restricted role of advising collectors. It must be a party to the great adventure of constantly renewed knowledge and understanding, which is one of the few activities issued from the past century in which we can legitimately take pride.

A third aspect of the experience of the university is students. They were important in two ways. One was the purely sensual pleasure of seeing and dealing with new men and women every year instead of returning every day to the same colleagues or other coworkers aging with you. There came a moment when I at least lost contact with what was about to become the generation of my grandchildren. I knew that when I realized that I had never heard of Madonna, Michael Jackson, or Michael Jordan. But even when one's usefulness or ability to communicate becomes restricted to advanced students and future professionals, the challenge of interesting and exciting young minds is far greater than that of impressing one's colleagues. Almost every one of my books began as a course or a seminar, perhaps as a series of lectures given in a university or a museum, and I owe them to the hundreds of by now mostly anonymous faces that came to hear about an art and a culture that, for the most part, was not their own.

These aspects—linguistic and cultural contexts, breadth and wealth of intellectual cohabitation, and the challenge, renewed each year, of youthful minds—were essential to the growth of my professional life and provided different directions, some trendy and temporary, others creative and enduring, to scholarship and thinking in Islamic art. All of them together brought Islamic art out of a restricted closet into full academic citizenship.

The fifth and last change brought into the life of Islamic art over the last half-century is the most difficult to grasp properly and to understand in all of its implications. In a broad sense, it is the importance taken by the contemporary world, its politics, the sins identified, quite wrongly for the most part, with orientalism, or the demands it made on all professionals. In a more narrow sense, it is that there are now some forty-four countries with a dozen different languages, often in bad relations with each other or with the outside world, that maintain monuments of Islamic art and that are involved in the study of Islamic art. These involvements vary from simple assertions of sovereignty and protection of monuments on a given territory to sponsoring conferences on art for political and national purposes or providing access to documents. Contact with as many of these countries as possible is more or less essential for learning and for the continuing gathering of information. But this contact has its problems. No one who has traveled or lived in Muslim lands can remain immune to the often very real emotional or cultural struggles that affect them. Algeria, Bosnia, Chechnya, Palestine, Kurdistan, Tajikistan, Kashmir, Afghanistan, Sinkiang, or the Sudan are all places where sad or tragic events have affected, or run the risk of affecting, the artistic heritage of these areas and, even more importantly, the education of men and women capable of learning about that heritage and of appreciating its products.

These visible struggles are the most apparent and the most

appalling part of this new dimension. They have often affected the growth of scholars by restricting visas and permits, by refusing access to monuments for academics from some countries, by rejecting publications on the basis of who wrote them and where rather than on their merit, by limiting library acquisitions and travel for one's own scholars, and so on. A depressing list of such difficulties and of the results derived from them could be drawn up. Such a list could be set up next to glorious lists of monuments, many of them from the Islamic world, registered as protected by inclusion in the roster of the Heritage of Mankind put together by UNESCO and thus recognized as the collective responsibility of all men and women.

Of greater interest and ultimately perhaps greater importance than the intelligent preservation of monuments, dissemination of ideas, and ease of access to both is the tremendous artistic activity which, with a few exceptions such as Afghanistan today, is found from Senegal to Indonesia and from Zanzibar to Sinkiang. This activity has taken many forms. One, restricted for the most part to the wealthier countries, consists in collecting by individuals and the development of museums, whose number and quality have increased considerably. There is then a first-rate modern architecture of Muslim lands, which slowly wins its place within the elite contemporary architecture hitherto dominated by the West. There are also painters, sculptors, ceramicists, and many other creative artists who have not been recognized as easily as architects, mostly because of a curious imperialist notion that the East must remain traditional to be true to itself, whereas the West has a sole right to innovation. It is no longer acceptable to see calligraphy alone as an "Islamic" subject, but it is only just to recognize that many artists in Muslim countries are seeking ways to understand their past and to relate to it, positively or not, but without merely copying it. They need and seek the knowledge, expertise, and intellectual help of historians,

who, only too often, are not equipped, psychologically or intellectually, to help, because most of them do not belong to contemporary Muslim culture, often have no particular sympathy for it, and equally frequently have no knowledge of their own contemporary art anyway. The latter is possibly unavoidable, but the sympathy for the contemporary world in whose past one is involved and a responsibility for the expression of its knowledge of and pride in that past were not expected of the old collector's or professor's world; should they be today?

There probably is no definitive answer to this question, but there is one last aspect of the contemporary world to bring up. Among the first twenty Ph.D.s I directed, all but three were Westerners (and one of the three became a distinguished curator at the Freer Gallery of Art); among the last twenty more than half came from the Middle East or, as happens more and more now, from recently immigrated families in Europe or America. The ethnic changes of the student population are well known, as are, I suppose, those of visitors to museums. We have now for the study of Islamic art and for all studies of the Muslim world, as for many other ethnic groups in the North America, a new public seeking an awareness of the past different from the awareness expected in the countries from which their parents came and different from the allegedly universal scientific and academic scholarship of old. Altogether, on the local or worldwide fronts, a new audience, new colleagues, and new expectations have further contributed tasks for which we are not, as a profession, well prepared and which we have not always handled very well.

I will not try to summarize this impressionistic, partial, and personal vision of the study of Islamic art during the past fifty years. The morphogenesis of fields and subfields is here to stay and will only increase. Therefore, the expectation that any one person can think or write intelligently and truthfully about the whole of Islamic art is all

but absurd, if not downright fraudulent. Whether institutions, museums, universities, research centers, book publishers, and departments of antiquities will draw the proper conclusions and create new posts is an open question. To my knowledge, so far only one museum in the United States, several in Europe, one university in the United States, and two in Europe have hired more than one person to handle the arts of one-fifth of humanity over three continents.

But there are, I believe, much more profound challenges ahead than the simple creation of new jobs. One such challenge lies in the responses we will provide for the many audiences facing us. Can traditional scholarship with its burden of linguistic competencies, with its requirement of an equilibrium between the knowledge of monuments or objects and theoretical grounding, the expectation of constantly evolving categories for the interpretation and understanding of the past, the ability to translate knowledge and ideas into words, can this admittedly elitist scholarship be preserved in a world in which few professionals can easily read more than two languages and most have not the time to read at all? Or rather, since the scholarly instinct and the search for knowledge for its own sake will always remain alive among some men and women, how will this interest, this passion, be expressed? Perhaps indeed the written word will be partly replaced by other forms of communication and I shall come back to this point in a moment. For there is another result of the multiplicity of audiences with which we deal. They require different things from us. The future scholar, the learned colleague, the educated amateur from one's own culture, the seeker for roots, the contemporary artist, or the ardent nationalist look for different messages and different information as well as interpretations. There is probably no way to meet all these requests with the same answers nor can the same people formulate all of them. How does one make choices? Are they individual, institutional, ethnic, religious, or

national? Is the museum or the university responsible for providing answers to all comers? Or should answers be transferred to some type of academic public relations office trained to understand audiences rather than to create knowledge? A priori, this last thought is depressing, but in reality we have developed in most aspects of our lives a reliance on consultants and experts in *how* to do things rather than in *what* to do and that is *why* the idea of a Washington, Paris, or Istanbul office of public relations experts dealing with Islamic art is not too far-fetched.

The second challenge is connected to the first one. We know that words and images can nowadays be transmitted everywhere in fractions of seconds. But this is not happening in our field as it is in physics, chemistry, or biology, even now in history and literature. In very recent years, Saudi money, Lebanese entrepreneurship, and Egyptian work have made accessible on CD-ROMs, with excellent indexing, the major historical Arabic texts and most of the Traditions of the Prophet. They are available for purchase by everyone and can be used everywhere. Art historians, on the other hand, have maintained a feudal attachment to proprietary rights on what we own, possess, or publish and rather idiotic interpretations of misguided copyright laws as well as questionable bureaucratic practices have complicated easy access to original works of art and to documents of all sorts, especially for students, foreigners, and those who do not have appropriate financial resources. Thus, the very possibilities opened up by new audiences and accumulated archives are thwarted by the obstacles put on the path of their dissemination. There is not much point in learning, in beautiful collections, and in exciting new ideas, if access to them is restricted by favoritism, cliques (national or other), or money. The purpose of beautiful collections of Islamic art in Washington, London, or Kuwait or of brilliant teaching at Harvard and Oxford is to make the collections and the teaching avail-

able to every student in Bangladesh, Zanzibar, or Tajikistan, to all descendants of Muslim, Christian, or Jewish ancestors from Spain to the Philippines wherever they are, to all those, whatever their origin or social standing, who become fascinated by the Dome of the Rock or Persian miniatures or who discover in the geometry of decoration or the abstraction of so many designs of Islamic art something akin to their own contemporary artistic experience.

The responsibility of making works of art and ideas accessible to all has always been in the hands of museums and universities. The technical capacity of doing it on a worldwide basis exists. The intellectual excitement that must accompany such transmissions is present in all those who are under forty years of age, and of a few older ones as well. The moral imperative of spreading the knowledge and understanding of the arts, Islamic or not, cannot and should not be denied. All that is needed is to create the administrative, financial, and human mechanisms to do so. The benefits are immense, the cost probably less than that of one bomber or one nuclear submarine. It is the responsibility of those rich countries that own most of the art and whose institutions of higher learning have included its study in their offerings to invest in making the art and the thoughts available to all. If the past fifty years have seen the field of Islamic art firmly planted in universities, as it had been in museums, the next decades should rise to the challenge of making it so easily accessible that learning about it will flourish and the loving appreciation of its monuments spread everywhere. ❧

Oleg Grabar's Recent Bibliography

This bibliography serves to update that published in *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): ix–xiii.

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